



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Prepared by the

JOINT COUNTY GANG PREVENTION TASK FORCE Montgomery County and Prince George's County, Maryland

Submitted to

County Executive Douglas M. Duncan
Montgomery County

County Executive Jack B. Johnson
Prince George's County

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Joint County Gang Prevention Task Force Co-Chairs

Carolyn W. Colvin

Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services Director

James Dula

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Melvin High

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I. NEED FOR ACTION

In recent months, law enforcement officials have seen a steady increase of violent, well-organized gangs across the Washington area. Recruitment of gang members is actively taking place throughout the Washington metropolitan region. The issue of community gang activity is a major concern in school communities and in immigrant neighborhoods. Local incidents of gang activity have been reported in the media in conjunction with regional, national and international occurrences.

Law enforcement research shows that there are approximately 3,600 gang members in Maryland, the District of Columbia and Virginia and that there are nine major active gangs and more than 100 additional crews, significant gangs and cliques region wide. According to Montgomery County and Prince George's County police departments and both State's Attorney's Offices:

- The mobility of gangs and gang members creates an insurmountable obstacle in attempting to compile a hard count of the number of gangs and/or gang members in the region. Many neighborhood crews or gangs form and disband on a frequent basis. In addition, gangs that are encountered and documented in one jurisdiction may also be encountered and documented in another jurisdiction. Multiple police contacts usually result in duplicate entries.

- Between 2000 and 2004, Montgomery County police officers logged over 2,400 contacts with gang members and associates. Each data entry represents an individual gang member or associate. This total figure also includes individuals who have never lived and/or no longer live in Montgomery County.
- One of the things that this Joint County Gang Prevention Task Force has accomplished is to give the most accurate picture of the numbers of gangs and gang members operating in the region. In Montgomery County, 70 different gangs have been identified at one time or another over the last five years. Over that time period 2,400 names were entered into a police database. As we have been able to refine the data, we currently estimate that there are 20 to 22 active gangs with approximately 540 to 560 active members and associates. While new gangs may periodically come and go, the 20 to 22 gangs have engaged in and continue to participate in some level of sustained criminal activity in Montgomery County.
- Gang activity has been documented in all of the Montgomery County police districts. The majority of documented gang activity occurs in specific areas of the 3rd, 4th and 6th police districts.
- In Prince George's County, police officials estimate there are 50 "crews" or gangs in the County, with a total of over 400 members.
- Officials in Prince George's County note an alarming rise in Hispanic gangs and report that the criminal activity of these gangs has expanded to sophisticated car theft rings and prostitution.
- The majority of gang-related incidents occur in Prince George's County Police District 1, in a 1.4 square mile area in Langley Park.

II. THE JOINT COUNTY TASK FORCE

In February 2004, faced with a rise in gang activity in both counties and in surrounding jurisdictions, Montgomery County Executive Douglas M. Duncan and Prince George's County Executive Jack B. Johnson established a Joint County Gang Prevention Task Force (Joint County Task Force) to facilitate the coordination of efforts related to the reduction and elimination of gang activity and gang violence.

Prior to the appointment of the Joint County Task Force, multiple public and private County institutions were independently working to tackle the increasing incidences of gang activity with only minimal exchange of information among them. The Joint County Task Force was challenged to identify opportunities to engage in regional partnerships to reduce and eliminate gang activity and to connect the many independent efforts. The Joint County Task Force includes representatives of public and private organizations as well as faith-based agencies, racial/ethnic community groups and nonprofit grassroots organizations.

The two County Executives charged the Joint County Task Force with conducting the following tasks and recommending strategies that focus on prevention, intervention and suppression solutions:

- Assess the nature and scope of gang activity in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties.
- Identify primary geographic areas and populations that require concentrated gang prevention efforts.
- Identify existing community resources available to respond to the problem of gang activity.
- Identify policies, programs and resources needed to implement gang prevention strategies in Montgomery County and Prince George's County.
- Identify opportunities for coordinated intercounty and interdepartmental planning to implement gang prevention strategies.
- Identify key public-private and community partnerships essential for implementation of gang prevention initiatives in schools and communities.
- Conduct municipal/community town hall meetings to obtain input from community residents.
- Recommend cultural and linguistic competency levels needed to implement gang prevention strategies responsive to at-risk youth and their families.
- Prepare and submit an accountability structure for periodic review of recommendations submitted by the Joint County Gang Prevention Task Force.

Outcomes expected from the Joint County Task Force include concrete plans to increase the safety and well-being of youth and families in critically affected areas of Montgomery and Prince George's Counties; increased awareness and capacity of families and communities to respond to factors that contribute to gang activity; and reduction of gang recruitment, gang participation and gang violence in local communities.

To oversee this extensive collaborative research and planning effort, the two County Executives appointed four leaders from both jurisdictions to serve as the Co-Chairs of the Task Force: Prince George's County Police Chief, Melvin High; Montgomery County Police Chief, Tom Manger; Prince George's County Deputy Chief Administrative Officer for Human Services, James Dula; and Montgomery County Health and Human Services Director, Carolyn Colvin.

Each county convened and managed its own individual task force. The Joint County Task Force met regularly to monitor the direction and progress of those efforts, review the final subcommittee reports and develop the framework and final report and recommendations for approval by the full membership of the Joint County Task Force.

Based on an array of research findings supporting this direction, the Joint County Task Force established three subcommittees: Prevention, Intervention and Suppression. These groups met regularly during the past seven months to review and analyze research and data, solicit community input and formulate recommendations in each respective area.

A key part of the information-gathering process was a series of municipal and town hall meetings held to solicit input from community members who have experienced firsthand the problems of gang activity. Individuals testifying at these public forums included parents, youth, community leaders, educators and current and former gang members.

Both counties also established a Web site devoted to publicizing the activities of the Joint County Task Force and provided an e-mail address so that residents from both counties could contact the Task Force with suggestions, concerns and comments.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

The subcommittees relied upon national models and research literature to frame their discussions and develop their recommendations, focusing in particular on the 2002 *Comprehensive Gang Model* from the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. As critical to the formulations of the recommendations, however, was the feedback and input the subcommittees received from the six town hall meetings.

This report is the result of a collaborative effort by both counties, and contains joint recommendations as directed by the two County Executives. Each county will issue its own Gang Prevention Task Force Report that provides information and resources specific to its region. The recommendations from the Joint County Task Force follow. These recommendations reflect the comprehensive approach of prevention, intervention and suppression strategies and are grouped in those categories. It must be noted, however, that all the subcommittees' recommendations interrelate. Some recommendations will be implemented jointly; that is, both counties will contribute staff and/or resources. Other recommendations are similar in intent and content but will be implemented by each county according to the demographics and specific needs, requirements and resources of the county.

Guiding Principles

Any comprehensive collaborative effort should be grounded in a set of guiding principles. Consequently the Joint County Task Force has endorsed the following to

underscore every recommendation:

- By addressing risk factors for gang involvement, a community can also address other issues faced by youth, young adults and their families such as substance abuse, teen pregnancy, truancy and drop-out rates, unemployment, bullying and mental health problems.
- All programs that address prevention, suppression, and intervention, whether existing or new to the community, must be culturally sensitive and must reflect the diversity of the community in which they operate.
- All new programs that address prevention, intervention, and suppression must be evidence-based with measurable outcomes, and must have evaluation programs built in to monitor their effectiveness.

General Recommendations

- (1) Establish a Joint County Gang Prevention Steering Committee that meets quarterly to continue the collaborative efforts and to monitor the progress of these recommendations. Members recommended to serve on the Committee include county representatives from the Police Departments, the Departments of Health and Human Services, Public Schools, State's Attorney's Offices, youth members and other agencies as appropriate.
- (2) Establish a coordinating entity for each county that is responsible for overseeing and coordinating the efforts of all public and private agencies involved in the areas of youth violence.
- (3) Work with local, state and federal legislators to design and develop joint agendas for the 2005 Congressional and General Assembly sessions that include legislation aimed at gang prevention, intervention and suppression actions as well as the identification of funding opportunities.
- (4) Develop an inventory of gang prevention materials and other program resources.
- (5) Develop a public awareness campaign designed to educate area residents, elected officials, educators, nonprofit and faith-based organizations and businesses about gangs, including risk factors and recruiting. Ensure that such a campaign is culturally sensitive and multilingual and takes into account the need for visual as well as written materials. Solicit support for this effort from the business community.
- (6) Develop a partnership with the University of Maryland/Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice to assist with research and program development and evaluation efforts.

Prevention Recommendations

- (1) Conduct a school safety assessment in Prince George's County and Montgomery County using the approach developed by the National School Safety Center. This type of assessment can be expanded to address safety issues in other public facilities as needed.
- (2) Implement and sustain after-school programs during the critical hours of 2 - 6 p.m. These programs must demonstrate through evaluation and analysis their effectiveness for the age, gender and ethnicity of program participants. Strengthen partnerships with private nonprofit agencies that provide resources and/or program space. Continued analysis should be undertaken to determine whether program hours are needed to serve youth whose parents may be working multiple jobs or during evening/nighttime hours.
- (3) Develop and implement a series of community meetings that reach out to youth, adults and parents and involve them in open, ongoing discussions about youth violence including gang involvement. Conduct surveys of youth attitudes about gang activities to gain their input regarding program development.

Intervention Recommendations

- (1) Develop a standardized information collection and data-management system to ensure that all public agencies in both counties collect and share the same data. This information is important for the purposes of policy, program and resource allocations.
- (2) Design and implement a joint county program in the greater Takoma/Langley Park area to address the needs of youth and young adults at risk of gang involvement. Draw upon the experience of the Montgomery County Workforce Investment Board, Prince George's County Workforce Services Corporation, and the business, nonprofit, civic and faith communities of the target area as appropriate.
- (3) Establish an anonymous tip line in each county for the reporting of suspected gang activity, graffiti or tagging and other occurrences of suspicious activity.
- (4) Actively participate with the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments to develop a regional strategy to address gang activity while maintaining the Prince George's and Montgomery County initiatives.

- (5) Provide assistance to municipalities, civic associations, unincorporated areas and community-based organizations to help them establish grassroots community programs such as mentoring and coaching that focus on youth at risk.
- (6) Create a range of appropriate safe haven resources where children and youth at risk of gang involvement can seek refuge from a threatening environment.
- (7) Expand and increase awareness of remedial education programs, technical education programs, employment training and entry level employment opportunities focused on areas with a high concentration of at-risk and gang-involved youth. Work with appropriate agencies (e.g., Montgomery County Workforce Investment Board, Prince George's County Workforce Services Corporation and local business associations) to develop additional vocational opportunities.

Suppression Recommendations:

- (1) Request the Boards of Education to review existing dress code policies to ensure that principals and school personnel can prohibit gang paraphernalia, suppress gang members' visibility and increase students' feelings of safety.
- (2) Expand the number of in-school police officers (Educational Facility Officers and School Resource Officers), extending the program into all high schools and middle schools.
- (3) Create, expand and sustain in-school suspension programs and/or develop programs designed to keep suspended students in a facility, if not a school. These programs should provide opportunities for academic assistance and social development.
- (4) Evaluate the effectiveness of the truancy process and enhance if necessary.